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ABSTRACT

Career education and competency-based teacher education (CBTE) raise some serious questions for those who are concerned with human values and humanistic growth in our modern, rapidly changing society. Schools are fundamentally political institutions designed to serve the needs of the American economy and, to an extent, the values of the middle class. CBTE is designed to insure that schools will remain essentially as they are, that is, serving the same politico-economic function as in the past. In this approach there is no consideration as to how teachers should teach. The competencies identified are based on teaching as it is rather than as it might or should be. Career education establishes as a prime goal of schools the preparation of students for the world of work, rather than primarily preparing them for life in a democracy. (LL)

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CAREER EDUCATION, CBTE, AND THE POLITICS OF CHANGE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Gerald J. Brunetti

To mount an assault on career education and competency based teacher education in one short talk is a bit like firing on a battleship with a BB gun. Lest I appear ridiculous, let me hasten to state that I do not intend to make any such broad attack. My purpose, rather, is to raise some important questions about these two movements as viewed from a certain political perspective and to suggest some appropriate responses for teacher educators.

Career education and CBTE have a good deal to recommend them. Career education attempts to deal with the large and unnecessary gap between life within the school, which is often trite and artificial, and life as it exists in the larger world beyond the school. If it is true that people learn best when involved with activity they consider important and if it is true that much of the malaise, ennui, and disruption within the schools can be attributed to students' forced involvement with activities they consider meaningless, then one could hardly justify the outright rejection of the career education concept. I have been impressed with the importance that alternative schools--such as open schools, free schools, store-front schools--attach to activities outside the school setting, including the world of work. Such contacts are also considered an important part of a good career education program. Indeed, the whole idea of requiring students to take increasing responsibility for their own lives, built into career education programs at the secondary level, seems appropriate for education in a democracy. I have no intention, in short, to call for the abolishment of career education with all its plans and programs.

Nor do I reject CBTE per se. This movement has certainly caused an important stir in teacher education. Colleges and universities have had to scrutinize closely what they are up to--what they are trying to achieve in pre-

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paring teachers and the extent to which they are succeeding. A great deal of fat in the curriculum, no doubt, has been cut out by institutions moving to CBTE; and more attention has been devoted to areas of training in which the institutions can actually deliver. Processes have been implemented wherein students already competent in certain areas can move on to other areas, while students needing extra work to acquire important knowledge or develop certain skills or attitudes can concentrate on these things. Similarly, school districts have been able to determine which competencies their teachers need to develop and have been able to request specific assistance from colleges instead of trundling off their teachers on a hit-or-miss basis to take existing course offerings. How can anyone object to such an enlightened improvement over previous forms of teacher education?

Well, yes and no. I contend that these two movements, career education and CBTE, raise some serious questions for those of us who are concerned with human values and humanistic growth in our modern, rapidly changing society. As I mentioned, I would like to look at them from a particular political perspective.

This perspective is based on the assumption that schools are fundamentally political institutions designed to serve the needs of the American economy and, to an extent, the values of the middle class. Schools, like hospitals and prisons, are "total institutions."[1] The inmates, students in this case, are subject to a system over which they have little control. They are catalogued and categorized, passed or failed, certified or not. Compulsory attendance laws require virtually all students to submit to this process, even when they or their parents are opposed to it.

Time is strongly emphasized in schools as in work. Students are expected to conform to a tight schedule, especially in secondary schools, and are fed

knowledge in time-regulated capsules. As others have noted, the whole scheme resembles in no small way an industrial production line. Is it any surprise that we hear references to the "school plant," "products" of the school, and students as "raw material"?

Students from poor families and minority groups fare rather badly in this system. Not trained so precisely in the processes that the school and the economic system favor, they tend to be classified in the bottom rungs of the academic hierarchy.

All of the students, however, by virtue of their success or failure in school, learn whether they are destined for the higher occupations with their attendant rewards or the lower-paying jobs, perhaps poverty. What better way to prepare kids psychologically for their "station in life."

Schools, then, are designed to produce graduates who are committed to the work ethic and fitted to serve the varied needs of business and industry. They are in this sense political institutions. Though not always effective in carrying out these political ends, they seldom operate in a manner inconsistent with them. All of these things have been pointed out before, and at greater length. I have repeated them here briefly to illustrate what I mean when I call schools political institutions.

Various problems associated with CBTE have been noted by its critics. Though I could dwell on these at some length, I would like to concentrate on its political implications. For I see CBTE as a movement designed to insure, through its preparation of teachers, that schools will remain essentially as they are today, i.e., serving the same politico-economic functions they always have.

Consider how we get teacher competencies. Margaret Lindsey discusses this in an article in the Journal of Teacher Education:

[Italics mine]

> Fundamentally, the identification of teaching competencies requires a conception of the nature and goals of education in a particular setting and the roles of teachers in that setting. A conception of teacher roles may be developed from available bodies of knowledge, overlaide with personal and social values and attitudes, and drawn heavily from reported empirical evidence about practice. . . .
>
> Another approach to identifying competencies involves departing from many descriptions of teacher behavior; . . .[2]

In other words, what we do is to look at how teaching is carried out in the schools--what sorts of things teachers in existing schools are called upon to do on a regular basis. We find, for instance, that most teachers spend a good portion of time dealing with whole classes of students in classrooms; that they are expected to keep order there and in the rest of the building; and that they are largely responsible for teaching a pre-planned, pre-approved curriculum put together with negligible input from students.

Now if these are the things teachers are expected to do, then it makes sense in the teacher education program to help candidates develop the competencies to do them--it makes sense to a point. But notice that in this approach there is no consideration of whether this is the way teachers should teach. The competencies identified are based on teaching as it is rather than on teaching the way it might be or should be. Teacher candidates who master these competencies can move smoothly into existing schools. The continued introduction of such people--other candidates having been eliminated or counseled out of education or sent off to the Peace Corps--would certainly help maintain the schools as they are and keep them serving the same political ends they serve today. This may sound a bit extreme, and perhaps it is; but looking at CBTE from a political vantage point, the objective seems clear.

Career education is more of a puzzle. As I have already suggested, schools have by and large succeeded in classifying students and seeing that they have the proper attitudes and skills for various occupations and places in the so-

cial system. Still, there is always room for improvement.

The career education concept, as most of you know, came from Sidney Marland, Commissioner of Education in that same song-and-dance troupe that has made Watergate a household word. Consider, for a moment, a national administration that is strongly committed to the free-enterprise system particularly as exemplified in big business, big agriculture, big industry. What does this administration see as it looks over the land and tries to formulate its educational policies? It sees for one thing that, due to advancing technology, there is a shortage of various kinds of skilled labor. It notices also a large unemployment rate among young people and a sinfully high proportion of people on welfare. It also notes a fear among many Americans that the country really is being "greened"--that large numbers of adolescents are eschewing traditional beliefs in the intrinsic value of work and the goodness of the system. Finally, it remarks a growing dissatisfaction among taxpayers who are tired of paying so much of their money for schools. What kind of educational program should this administration offer to satisfy its own commitments and the desires of its constituency?

Like a flash from heaven comes the answer: career education! A well articulated program in career education would insure that agribusiness and industry had their pool of skilled labor and, with some luck, have them trained at public expense. Such a program could nip in the bud incipient negative attitudes towards work before they exploded on the assembly line or resulted in, God forbid! large numbers of young people content in their non-employment.[3] Finally, taxpayers could be mollified by a career education program that, however expensive, would steer their children into some sort of gainful employment.

Understand that this marvelous concept is not intended as a mere appendage

to the existing curriculum. To quote Arthur Lee Hardwick, Associate Commissioner of Education:

> . . . the entire school program must be restructured. . . . Career education is a comprehensive educational program focused on careers, which begins in grade 1 or earlier and continues throughout the adult years. For elementary and secondary education the program includes a structuring of basic subjects, grades 1-12, around the theme of career opportunities and requirements in the world of work.[4]

Thus, instead of providing an education whose primary stated purpose is to prepare enlightened citizens for life in a democracy and only a secondary purpose to give them skills for specific careers, schools under the Marland plan would be expected to switch these priorities. Henceforth, liberal education--and I mean by that the development of confident, self-aware, thinking and considerate individuals--would occur only in the context of and as an adjunct of career education. Let me quote the Man himself:

> . . . the primary reason for the failure of the schools to serve many young people adequately . . . can be traced to what we call general education. If we could replace that curriculum with the kind of creative and productive schooling that enables youngsters to carve out careers for themselves we would save a good deal of money.[5]

Depending, of course, on how you define the term, the whole movement can be seen as a systematic effort to reestablish the somewhat tarnished work ethic--an ethic more in tune with the political philosophy of the Nixon administration--and to feed in more efficient fashion the labor needs of business and industry.

Even granting the potential benefits of career education, one must question a movement that establishes as the prime goal of schools the preparation of kids for the world of work. As Burton Clark points out:

> The close link of education to the economy in advanced industrial societies turns education into a talent farm, a massive "people-processing" enterprise preparing manpower for the specifications of occupational demand and government blueprint. . . . When the educational system is hypnotized with occupational demand, it will also overlook the requirements of a man when he is off the job.[6]

I believe, then, that career education and CBTE, like other educational movements in recent years--behavioral objectives, accountability, NDEA workshops, to name a few--are essentially political in nature. They attempt to make the school more effective and more efficient at doing what it has always done, i.e., feeding young people smoothly into appropriate slots in the economic system.

In the title of this talk, I referred to "the politics of change in teacher education." One of the things I meant by this is that any change in teacher education which threatens the fundamental, deeply-ingrained, political nature of our schools is bound to be met with strong resistance; at best, it will probably ~~be~~ prove ineffective. If you believe, as I do, that schools must change if they are adequately to prepare students for responsible, humane lives in the twenty-first century, then you are faced with a dilemma.

The situation is exacerbated by the present economic crisis in the schools. A few years ago we could count on the availability of teaching positions for our strongest, most creative candidates--people who could see purposes for education beyond career preparation and who had the skills to effect their ideas. With such teachers we could at least cherish the hope that changes would gradually evolve in the schools. Unfortunately, those days are gone, at least for the present. For the few teaching positions that become available, schools seem to prefer our safer candidates, the ones that would cause the least upset to the system; and as I indicated earlier, our CBTE programs are helping us identify such candidates and prepare them for smooth passage into the schools.

So what do we do? I believe that one of the answers, like the problem itself, lies in politics. I believe that we need to build into our teacher education programs systematic training in educational politics. We need to

have our students understand something of the political realities operating within and outside of schools which inhibit the ability of teachers to pursue humanistic goals. We need to train our teacher candidates how to survive in this political milieu without losing sight of these goals, and beyond this, how to use the system to their advantage to implement changes they consider important. This is the second thing I meant by "the politics of change in teacher education."

The question, "Can we accept CBTE and career education?" becomes, instead, "How do we use these movements to achieve our humanistic ends?" Despite my skepticism, I think there are some ways. In the case of CBTE, for instance, we can write competencies which will require students to assess the value of their other competencies and to look beyond them. More immediately, we can establish competencies which will specify the kinds of political knowledge and skills we want our candidates to have. Under our tutelage, students can learn how to view the functions and operations of schools from a political perspective; how to "case" a school and find out how the power is distributed among administrators, teachers, clerical and custodial personnel, etc.; how to assess the impact of the community on the school; how to get the support of the principal or the parents or the other teachers for innovative ideas; how to operate effectively within the classroom without arousing hostility in the school; how to deal with problems of censorship. In short, it seems to me, we can use CBTE methods to help teachers become astute agents for change within the school systems. Indeed, it appears that the schools where many graduates are most likely to get jobs--i.e., in rural or small-town schools--are those most in need of change and most likely to require the utmost political finesse of young teachers if they are to survive.

The political competencies I have been talking about apply as much to in-service as to pre-service teachers. In a summer workshop I was involved with several years ago, I was struck by the number of teachers who needed political advice more than anything else I could give them. On an individual or small-group basis we dealt with question like: How can I get around parents who are convinced that we need to teach traditional grammar? How do I deal with an administration that allows a speaker from the American Legion address an assembly but bans a speaker from the Veterans for Peace? How do I handle complaints that I give too many A's and don't flunk enought kids? And how can five of us initiate an elective program when the department chairman is dead-set against it? In most cases, working together, we were able to arrive at satisfactory political solutions to these problems. I am convinced that we can develop competencies that address such questions.

Career education lends itself to similar responses. Teachers, for instance, can learn to deal with it by redefining it. A suggestion along these lines comes from Ralph A. Smith, writing in the Journal of Aesthetic Education.[8] He sees career education as the initiation of students into the human career (his term). The human career involves work, which he describes (in the words of Ernst Cassirer) as including such basic productions as language, art, science, religion, history, and myth. Career education is taking place if students are becoming skilled in these forms of human production. Redefining terms in this way, we can easily agree with Marland's contention that "all education is career education--or should be."[7]

Even if teachers are tied down to more occupationally oriented forms of career education, they can learn to make adjustments that will improve kids' preparation for their human career. I know of one career education project that involves bringing in the local banker to discuss his work and the type

of education it requires and to be interviewed by the students. What an opportunity for them to ask some questions relevant to the human career but probably not contained in many career education manuals! Questions such as:

> Why are most bank tellers women and most executives men?
>
> How are decisions made in regard to working conditions? Do employees have any say about such matters as dress?
>
> How much of the loan money of the bank is committed to low-income housing? What happens to people when you foreclose on their mortgate?
>
> Can minority people get loans as easily as white people?
>
> Does the bank invest money in companies that are guilty of polluting the environment?
>
> How much time does a banker have for his or her family? Do they approve of his or her work?

Through questions such as these, students can get a broader picture of how various jobs might affect their human career. In a similar vein, laboring people might be invited to the school to relate not only details about their jobs but attitudes they have towards their work--their degree of job satisfaction and how their work relates to their larger goals and ambitions in life. Perhaps students will discover that for many people a job is simply a job; but that when their sense of self-worth is only minimally dependent upon their jobs, they can still be happy, self-fulfilled people. These are just a few examples of how a politically savvy teacher can modify career education programs to serve humanistic ends.

I am suggesting, then, that teacher educators become more politically minded in the sense that they provide experiences--implement competencies, if you will--that will enable teachers to deal more effectively with a system that, in function and operation, is essentially political. I am suggesting that teacher educators play the politics of change--that they work

to overcome the forces of stasis and careerism in the schools by preparing teachers who can make adroit use of the existing structures and the politics that support them to change the system from within.

* * * * * * * * * * *

Footnotes:

1. "Total institutions" is a term used by Charles E. Silberman, Crisis in the Classroom (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 146. Silberman apparently borrowed the term from Philip W. Jackson, Life in Classrooms, (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968).

2. "Performance-based Teacher Education: Examination of a Slogan," XXIV:3, (Fall, 1973), p. 183.

3. The reality of this latter concern is brought out by Rupert N. Evans and Gordon McCloskey in their article in the Journal of Aesthetic Education ("Rationale for Career Education," VII:4, (October, 1973), p. 14): "An even more basic problem is developing, however; there is a youthful subculture which rejects work, largely because its members do not understand the contributions of work to society and to individual well-being in more than a monetary sense.

   "It is a well-known fact that attitudes are first shaped early in life and that attitudes toward work are formed like other attitudes. . . . These findings suggest that the part of career education which has to do with attitudes toward work (e.g., the dignity of all production workers) needs to start in early childhood. Moreover, they suggest that the present elementary school program is having little effect on changing attitudes toward work."

4. "Career Education--A Model for Implementation," Business Education Forum, XXV:8 (May, 1971), p. 3.

5. "Marland on Career Education," Urban Review, V:6 (June, 1972), p. 3.

6. Quoted by Ralph A. Smith, "The Arts, Cultural Services, and Career Education: Recommendations for Curriculum Work," Journal of Aesthetic Education, VII:4 (October, 1973), 102-3.

7. "Marland on Career Education," p. 4.

8. Smith, 98-99.

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